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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of corporal punishment in public schools. It presents a brief history of corporal-punishment practices and explains why corporal punishment remains a legal means of control in the schools of 23 states in the United States. Opponents of corporal punishment argue that it should be abolished from schools because it models violence, does not teach appropriate behaviors or problem-solving skills, and is discriminatorily applied to black males in elementary schools and those with learning/mental/behavioral disabilities. Eleven alternatives to corporal punishment are highlighted: nonacknowledgement of disruptive behavior and reinforcement of appropriate behavior, signal interference, proximity control, interest boosting, tension reduction through humor, hurdle helping, program restructuring, the use of routine to provide security, direct appeal, removal of seductive objects, and positive removal of student from the classroom. The paper also presents 14 nonaversive strategies to prevent misbehaviors and promote prosocial skills. It is recommended that teacher-education programs provide behavior-management courses and that parents and teachers investigate nonaversive discipline options. Contains a list of 5 resources and 23 references. (LMI)

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Changing Community Policies: Your Role in Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools

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ABSTRACT

The article describes the use of corporal punishment with students in public schools. A brief history of these practices are discussed, and reasons why corporal punishment still remains a legal means of control in the public schools of twenty-three states. Suggestions for community involvement as well as alternative procedures for prevention and interventions are proposed.

Running Head: CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

Changing Community Policies: A Teacher Training Model to Eliminate Corporal Punishment in Schools

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Corporal punishment to correct students' disruptive behaviors are currently being used by numerous educators in public schools. Corporal punishment is legally allowed in twenty-three states, and the political climate of the country is directed at punishment rather than restitution. The fear of violence and the public's perception of undisciplined schools have caused an outcry for sterner measures of discipline. According to the results of a Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools, the category "fighting, violence, and gangs" shared with "lack of discipline" as the biggest problem confronting local public schools (Elam, 1994).

Attitudes Toward Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment, as an institutional practice to manage behavior, appears to be supported by parents and teachers in several regions of the United States. A survey conducted by Parents Magazine revealed that 55% of parents questioned disapproved of paddling in schools, 38% approved and 6% were not sure. However, in the southern states, parent approval increased to 53% (Groller, 1989). How do educators feel about such disciplinary measures ? In a national poll of teachers, 48 percent

opposed corporal punishment, 41 percent supported it and 11 percent were not sure. Even though more respondents than not opposed corporal punishment, the consensus was to have it as an option (Pross, 1988). In another poll, 75 percent of teachers surveyed believed that corporal punishment in schools should not be discontinue (Brown, 1988). In states where corporal punishment is allowed, the attitudes of educators are even more adamant. A state wide study in Louisiana investigated teachers' perceptions on the use of corporal punishment and the results revealed that 75 percent of teachers perceived corporal punishment to be a legal and legitimate process for student management (Holland, Mize, White, 1991). Richardson and Evans (1994) polled school administrators in Louisiana and found that 73 percent believed that paddling was a viable means to discipline students, and 63 percent of the respondents indicated that they would not support legislature to abolish corporal punishment in Louisiana. In Washington D.C., Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon revived the controversy when she suggested that the D.C. school system reinstate corporal punishment, a practice which was ended in 1918. Her statement met with mixed reactions from both parents and educators (French, 1991). Representative Major R. Owens response to Dixon was, "One thing the children of Washington don't need is more violence. Their lives are already full of violence" (District's Mayor, 1991).

Corporal Punishment in Schools

The use of corporal punishment is historically authorized through in loco parentis, a tradition from English common law giving teachers the right to administer physical punishment to students (Messina, 1988). Corporal punishment was a popular form of punishment for students during the early years of our country. A Stokes County, North Carolina list of school rules gave 47 behaviors which led to lashings including 10 lashes for playing cards at school. The rod of correction used in early schools could be a stiff rope, cowhide whip, or even a cat-o-nine tails. In early frontier schools, women teachers who promised to flog the boys generously were more likely to win teaching positions (Van Dyke, 1984). Corporal punishment is defined as chastisement inflicted on the body in order to modify behavior (Rich, 1989). In a school setting it typically involves paddling, shoving, shaking, pinching, ear pulling, hair pulling or arm twisting (Hyman, 1990).

In twenty-three states, education is the only institution which legally supports corporal punishment. This practice, however, is forbidden for persons in the military and prisons, and with employees in the work force. Corporal punishment of students is prohibited in the schools of developed countries of the world, except in the United States, South Africa, and parts of Australia and Canada (Fathman, 1993). In 1992, the total reported number of all students paddled by school teachers or administrators was 555,531 students, and 38,428 of these paddlings were dispensed to

students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1992). There is no data on the unreported paddlings of students and these incidents may be more prevalent.

Justification for corporal punishment is often found in the Anglo-Saxon Christian fundamentalist traditions. Advocates of paddling children often quote from the Book of Proverbs when justifying their punitive actions. The rod of correction must not be spared and a good whipping will suppress a child's inherently evil nature (Hyman, 1990). Corporal punishment is supported by decisions of the Supreme Court which ruled that such disciplinary procedures are not in violation of constitutional rights. In addition, it was ruled that the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment does not apply to corporal punishment in public schools (Baker v. Owen, 1975; Ingraham v. Wright, 1977).

Why Not Corporal Punishment?

Why should corporal punishment be banned from schools ? While the administration of corporal punishment temporarily suppresses undesired behaviors it models violence and implies that "might is right." Moreover, it does not teach appropriate behaviors, nor does it teach logical problem solving skills. Children are taught, by adults in authority, to resolve conflicts through aggression (Radin, 1988). Corporal punishment in schools is discriminatory. The most frequent recipients being impoverished black males in elementary schools (Hyman, 1990). Minority students are paddled in

disproportionate numbers when compared to their white peers and boys are paddled at a rate of twenty-five to one when compared to girls (Slate, Perez, Waldrop, & Justen, 1991). Corporal punishment is inhumane. In a national study 86% of principals indicated that they would use corporal punishment with students with learning disabilities, 83% would use it with students with mental retardation, and 77% would use it with students with behavior disorders (Rose, 1989). Furthermore, students with these disabilities are often at greater risk of being paddled at home (Zirpoli, 1990).

Alternative to Corporal Punishment

Proactive as well as reactive strategies are needed in dealing with disruptive students. Interventions from various models of behavior management include strategies from the behavioral, humanistic, ecological and cognitive models.

The following procedures are adapted from Redl and Wineman's (1957) Behavior Influence Techniques and are designed to prevent potential disruptions from occurring.

- **PLANNED IGNORING**

  The teacher basically ignores the disruptive behavior and reinforces students when they exhibit the appropriate behavior (pencil tapping, hand waving, body movement, or grimacing). This technique is appropriate for behaviors that although benign, are annoying to others.

- **SIGNAL INTERFERENCE**

The teacher uses nonverbal techniques or signals, such as eye contact, a frown, finger snapping, toe tapping, light flicking, index finger on lips, can alert students to their unacceptable behavior. Conversely nonverbal signals can be used to reinforce acceptable behaviors in the classroom.

- **PROXIMITY CONTROL**

The teacher moves inconspicuously closer to the student without calling attention to the behavior. Very frequently the proximity or the closeness of an authority figure (teacher, parent, police officer) results in the termination of unacceptable behaviors. In addition, proximity can have a positive effect on children who are anxious and insecure.

- **INTEREST BOOSTING**

The teacher provides an interest boost by helping a student or by changing the activity when the student is experiencing difficulty, or losing interest in an task. For example, when working with sight word flash cards, give the students their own cards and allow them to illustrate the words on the back of each card. Older students can provide mnemonics to remember the word.

- **TENSION REDUCTION THROUGH HUMOR**

The teacher smiles, laughs, and makes light of a tense situation. A joke or a humorous comment will frequently reduce tension.

Humor should not be used at the expense of hurting any student. and sarcasm must be avoided.

- **HURDLE HELPING**

  The teacher provides help before the student becomes disruptive or discouraged. Hurdle helping may include an encouraging word, help with an assignment, providing additional materials etc.

- **PROGRAM RESTRUCTURING**

  The teacher restructures a lesson when he or she observes that the students are not responding. This must be done before the students become disruptive or lose all interest in the lesson.

- **SUPPORT FROM ROUTINE**

  The teacher organizes, announces, posts and discusses daily schedules with the students. Students with behavior problems feel secure and comfortable with fixed routines and schedules.

- **DIRECT APPEAL**

  The teacher can resolve a problem quickly and effectively through direct appeal to the students' sense of fairness. The direct appeal will be more successful when the following are present.

  1. The teacher's genuinely cares about the students.
  2. Consequences for unacceptable behavior. Consequences must be fair, clarified and understood in advance.
  3. The impact of the behavior on the students' peers.
  4. The teacher's influence and control over the students.
  5. A democratic and positive climate.

- **REMOVAL OF SEDUCTIVE OBJECTS**

  The teacher removes objects (radios, magazines, toys etc.) which may be distracting or a possible target for disruption.

- **ANTISEPTIC BOUNCING**

  The teacher removes an agitated student from the environment before he or she becomes physically or verbally disruptive. The removal is perceived as positive, such as sending the agitated student on an errand, to defuse a possible explosive situation.

In addition to the Behavior Influencing Techniques the following non-aversive strategies can be used to prevent misbehaviors and promote prosocial skills.

- **POWER STRUGGLES**

  The teacher provides the student with space. Avoid backing the student to a corner. It takes two to engage in a struggle and the students should be allowed to save face. Confronting situation can be used to model conflict resolutions techniques.

- **FRUSTRATIONAL LEVEL**

  The teacher avoids teaching to the students' frustrational level. Lessons should be challenging but attainable and motivating.

- **LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN**

  The teacher uses active and reflective listening and listen to the feeling as well as to the words. The teacher avoids threatening, admonishing, preaching, condemning, criticizing, and using sarcasm.

- **A WARM AND ORDERLY CLIMATE**

  The teacher provides an orderly climate while maintaining a warm and positive attitude. He or she must convey to the students a message that is perceived as caring and helping.

- **CONSISTENT AND FAIR**

  The teacher is consistent and fair in the use of positive reinforcement and in administering consequences. Students quickly recognize when teachers are inconsistent in their classroom management. Lack of consistency and fairness often create a disruptive climate. However, the teacher must also be flexible and consider situations and individual differences.

- **SEPARATE THE MISBEHAVIOR FROM THE CHILD**

  The teacher accepts the students unconditionally and as persons of worth. It is important for the teacher to identify the behavior that is not acceptable, and keep it separate from the value of the person. Communicate "I" messages instead of "You" messages: Cursing is not acceptable and interferes with teaching and learning, and I don't like it" NOT "You have a filthy mouth and you should be ashamed of yourself".

- **GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

  The teacher empowers students by encouraging cooperative learning procedures and class ownership activities. This is important in promoting positive behavior. When students are allowed to participate in their learning they are less likely to become bored and disruptive.

- **LEAVE YOUR LUGGAGE ON THE DOORSTEP**

  The teacher sets aside personal problems and biases. Everybody has personal problems and opinions. It is critical for teachers to be non-judgmental and leave their problems out of the classroom. When personal problems and prejudices are transferred to the teaching environment, teachers are less effective and students' misbehavior are magnified.

- **RADIATE ENTHUSIASM**

  The teacher show enthusiasm and confidence. When teachers do not radiate excitement, the students cannot be expected to be enthusiastic about learning. The outcome is often student misbehavior and/or apathy.

- **ANTECEDENT CONTROL**

  The teacher controls antecedent events to avoid conflict situations. The teacher manipulates the environment to produce positive results and avoid conflict. For example, plan the seating arrangement to separate disruptive students.

- **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

  The teacher models and teaches each students how to use self-regulation, self-recording, self-evaluation, and self-rewarding. Teach verbal mediation (thinking out loud) and problem solving. For example, target a behavior such as interrupting, discuss the intervention with the student teach him or her to record the instances of interrupting using a wrist golf counter. Together graph and discuss the data.

- **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

  The teacher teaches students conflict resolution skills such as compromise, communication, brainstorming solutions, prioritizing solution, apologizing and restitution. Form peer mediation groups at the school or classroom levels.

- **SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING**

  The teacher teaches social skills, there is an abundance of social skills programs on the market. Teachers can develop social skills objectives and activities in the following area: Social Cognition, Social Interaction, Social Effectiveness, Decision Making, and Social Competence.

- **DISCOVER THE CAUSE**

  The teacher considers the cause. The teacher does not have to be a psychoanalyst to discover the cause of the misbehavior, however, students misbehave for varied obvious reasons. Some want attention, some seek power and control, some want revenge, while others feel helpless and become passive aggressive.

Conclusion

In recent years the use of corporal punishment in schools has decreased. Twenty-seven states now prohibit corporal punishment and numerous national organizations have declared their opposition to its use. These include, the Council for Exceptional Children, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association for Counseling and Development, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Congress of Parents and Teacher, and the American Humanist Association (Evans & Richardson, 1995; Fathman, 1993). Despite the gains in support and the mounting evidence of the dangers of paddling, corporal punishment remains a regularly used practice and an option to discipline students in public school (Richardson & Wilcox, 1994; Richardson & Evans, 1993).

Teacher training programs at the universities must offer behavior management courses to all prospective teachers. School districts must offer ongoing inservice workshops to keep practicing teachers current in various methods of behavior management.

Parents and teachers should be encouraged to investigate various non-aversive options to manage students' disruptive and anti-social behaviors. Schools, through their Parent Associations, can offer parenting classes and teach alternative discipline methods to corporal punishment. Alternatives to aversive interventions should include proactive and reactive strategies. These procedures are effective in teaching aggressive students

self-management and in raising their awareness that someone really cares about them.

Schools are an important part of every community and students, parents, teachers and administrators need to participate in changing negative and inhumane policies and strive to establish values that will contribute to a kinder and gentler America.

Resources

The following are resources to help educators and families to change policies concerning eliminating paddling in schools.

National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment in Schools
Robert Fathman, Chairperson
155, W. Main Street, # 100-B
Columbus, OH 43215 -- Phone: (614) 221-8829

End Violence Against the Next Generation
Adah Maurer, Executive Director
977, Keeler Avenue
Berkley, CA 94708 -- Phone (510) 527-0454

National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse
Mary Lubertozzi, Director
332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604 -- Phone: (312) 663-3520

National Center for the Study of Corporal Alternatives in Schools
Irwin A. Hyman, Director
Temple University, 251 Rutter Annex
Philadelphia, PA 19122 -- Phone: (215) 579-4864

People Opposed To Paddling Students Inc. (P.O.P.S.)
Jimmy Dunne, Director
P.O.Box 19045
Houston, TX 77224 -- Phone: (713) 493-6232

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TABLE I

STATEWIDE BANS ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Corporal Punishment Banned by Law

California	Massachusetts	North Dakota
Connecticut	Michigan	Oregon
Hawaii	Minnesota	South Dakota
Illinois	Montana	Vermont
Iowa	Nebraska	Virginia
Maine	Nevada	Washington
Maryland	New Jersey	West Virginia
		Wisconsin

Corporal Punishment Banned by State Regulation

Alaska	New Hampshire	New York	Utah

Corporal Punishment Banned By Every School Board in the State

Rhode Island

Source: The Last ? Resort: Newsletter of the Committee to END VIOLENCE AGAINST THE NEXT GENERATION, (1993 Fall).
Based on data obtained from the U.S. Department of Education

Available from 977 Keeler Ave. Berkeley, CA 94708-1498